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ETHICS AND THE MILITARY PROFESSION

(Published Periodically by the Ethics and Professionalism Committee, USMA)

CAN ETHICS BE TAUGHT?

(December 1978)

With the United States Military Academy firmly committed to the proposition that ethics can and will be taught, the question of its teachability may sound absurdly academic. In preparing its "Concept for Furthering Cadet Moral Development," the Ethics and Professionalism Committee, USMA, specifically isolated seven core courses and several electives which attempt "to meet the Army's needs for officers with well-considered standards and values" by contributing "to the moral development of cadets." Among those core courses is a 2.5 credit hour, one semester course, in Philosophy and Ethics. Yet, despite burgeoning interest in morality and ethical behavior, as well as a proliferation of academic courses in ethics in curricula of colleges, universities, and professional schools, there is--perhaps not unexpectedly--widespread skepticism concerning the fruits to be harvested from such courses, particularly those offered in undergraduate curricula. A cynical commonplace not infrequently heard is: the prisons are full of people who had ethics courses. Without trying to prove or refute such folk-wisdom, let us merely suggest that those individuals might have had even more crowded living conditions had not those courses been taught. Such is one inference capable of being drawn from R.D. Archambault's encouragement in the *Harvard Educational Review*:

> Success in this endeavor does not insure moral conduct. . . . However, it would be dangerous to believe that success in moral instruction would be trivial or vacuous. For although it is true that knowing the good does not guarantee the doing of it, it is similarly true that an absence of knowledge of the good and skill in judging the good often makes moral conduct impossible, even if one desires to do the good and has the will to do so. . . . Perhaps, then, we have ample opportunity, within the liberal arts and sciences to engage in moral instruction which will be conducive to moral conduct, but which will not insure it. (pp. 482-48[illegible])

Archambault's comments, optimistic yet pragmatic, deserve careful consideration.

Perhaps some of the suspicions in regard to teaching ethics result from wholesale misunderstanding about what "ethics" is and the anticipated goals of an ethics course. Certainly the "aim of all moral reflection" is, as Bonhoeffer claims, a "knowledge of good and evil." But what exactly, "ethics" is, as distinguished from ethical behavior *per se* has historically been variously conceived. One moral philosopher, Paul W. Taylor, says

"ethics may be defined as the philosophical study of morality" (*Problems of Moral Philosophy*, p. 3). Of course, lacking in this definition are two important considerations: What we mean by "morality" and what makes a study of morality a philosophical study. The *American Heritage Dictionary* improves upon this definition slightly in defining ethics as "the study of the general nature of morals and the specific moral choices to be made by the individual in his relationship with others." The *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, however, is quick to remind us that "there is no uncontroversial Archimedean point from which ethics can be characterized." That is not to say, however, that moral philosophers in the classical tradition--Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Hobbes, Spinoza, Butler--did not believe they could communicate objective knowledge concerning good and evil. Perhaps a clearer and more comprehensive way of defining ethics is:

> The branch of philosophy that investigates morality, and, in particular, the varieties of thinking by which human conduct is guided and may be appraised. Its special concern is in the meaning and justification of utterances about the rightness and wrongness of actions, the virtue or vice of the motives which prompt them, and the praiseworthiness or blameworthiness of the agents who perform them, and the goodness or badness of the consequences to which they give use. (*The Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought*, pp. 214-215)

The very language of the definition gives rise to some suspicions concerning the teachability of the discipline. Despite Plato's belief that we all know the "good" and need only recollect it, one must admit that words like "morality," "human conduct," "appraised," "rightness," "wrongness," "virtue," "vice," "goodness," and "badness" can be subject to diverse interpretations. Nevertheless moral philosophy, whether theorized by subjectivists or objectivists, has traditionally had a practical purpose. Moral knowledge was not conceived as simply theoretical but had practical implications for how man lived. Indeed some moral philosophers--Plato for one--would find it inconceivable that knowledge of right and the "good" would not insure the practice of the good. Whatever the merits of that specific claim, moral philosophers, regardless of individual ways of systematizing and unifying moral knowledge, have been unanimous in their belief that "objective practical knowledge about how we should live" can be learned, and indeed must be learned, if mankind is to preserve a sense of community.

We see then that moral philosophers have traditionally held to a dual purpose for moral education--instruction in knowledge of moral norms and the consequent application of those norms. As a professional school, West Point is clearly interested in both aspects of the traditional concerns. Archambault reminds us that Aristotle "emphasized the importance of habituation or practicing right acts, so that the student's will would be trained to do what his mind told him was right" (p. 476); thus the need not to allow ourselves to think of ethics' being taught only in one class, by one department. Inquiry into ethical ramifications of decision making and behavior must be emphasized as a vital issue throughout the curriculum, in all

disciplines, lest we open ourselves to the cynical claim of ethical dilettantism.

Alasdair MacIntyre in an article in *The New Republic* (May [illegible]) laments, "What on earth can be going on in a society where . . . morality [has] to be rediscovered?" There have been [illegible], however, indicating that such is the case. The question remains [illegible] stimulate the process of rediscovery. In other words, what are the [illegible] results of a course in ethics? Some people fear an attack on [illegible] pluralistic society through classroom indoctrination [illegible] ethical position. Others see ethics as too intellectually subjective [illegible] "soft" to be accomplished in the amount of time allotted to the curriculum. This view often alleges that instruction in ethics is really a [illegible] into the realm of personality development with no potential for [illegible] content. The contending pole is the cognitive (content) approach to value instruction. This school of thought attempts to codify values and [illegible] a hierarchical relationship in value education. According to these educators, values can, indeed, be taught.

What then *should* the goals of ethical inquiry be? Again, this question is difficult to answer because different disciplines approach the question from different intellectual backgrounds. The problem is doubly complex in a professional school where there is an implicit ethic or ethical commitment on the part of the institution--The United States Military Academy--and the profession it serves. There are some who believe the goal of such instruction should be an attempt to develop "better" people--more virtuous, moral, [illegible], sensitive, and ethically discriminating--and in turn better army officers. Another viewpoint--equally cognitive--involves teaching students how to reason more cogently, analyze more discriminatingly, and recognize presuppositions or underlying premises of moral arguments. This approach emphasizes the study of different ethical theories with a view to assessing strengths and weaknesses of each. A third goal might be that of consciousness raising. This approach reflects Hamlet's advice to Horatio that "there are more things in heaven and earth" than the student has yet "dreamt of in . . . [illegible] philosophy." A fourth, closely allied approach, suggests a dispassionate glance at competing ethical systems from a historical perspective. In addition to providing intellectual stimulation, this approach enables students to locate their ethical norms within mankind's cultural heritage.

There is, of course, a fifth approach to teaching ethics--one [illegible] prevalent in our colleges and professional schools. This [illegible] is simply to ignore such aspects of education. This [illegible] into because of the inability to test moral behavior. [illegible]--the [illegible] goes--we should not teach what we can not test. While we *can* teach [illegible] knowledge and ethical theories we can not, without a good deal of [illegible] and potential for indoctrination, teach moral behavior. William [illegible], in "What Philosophy Tries to Teach," has some interesting views on the issue. Certainly the student of ethics learns standards of [illegible] methodology, but the real education involves [illegible] content. It is the search for Truth. [illegible] instruction [illegible] leading them to focus their views--with viable ethical theories which they can apply in real life moral dilemmas. [illegible]

Callahan admonishes, whatever the goals of ethics instruction, one thing is imperative: "those who teach ethics must be fairly clear about just which goals they are trying to accomplish . . . lest the result be a general swamp of competing purposes, confused pedagogies, and muddled students who are simply not certain what they are supposed to be learning."

Which one of these approaches has West Point adopted? The "Concept for Furthering Cadet Moral Development" reflects a synthesis of the best aspects of these separate approaches.

> The United States Army, entrusted as it is with the nation's treasure, must be led by officers who are moral individuals. The traits of character traditionally associated with moral persons are the traits that have distinguished the best military leaders . . . . As a rule, armies founder and nations are poorly served when their military officers give up the moral life and reject the values related to these virtues.
>
> The United States Military Academy avows its deep and abiding commitment to the moral growth of its cadets. They are the persons who will form the nucleus of the Officer Corps. The Military Academy therefore insists on certain institutional values chosen for their appropriateness in contributing to the self-development of moral persons and for constituting standards to which all Army officers can proudly subscribe. New graduates cannot be fully rehearsed for every moral problem that might confront them, but they should have a firm idea of what their country expects from its Army's officers and what their profession requires. To reject these institutional values is to spurn the essence of West Point, though to accept the values is not to avoid the need for creative moral thought. Indeed, the Military Academy acknowledges that its graduates may and will subscribe to a variety and range of ethical systems and anticipates that all cadets will analyze closely and evaluate rationally their own moral belief . . . .
>
> The degree to which cadets grow morally and forge for themselves an ethic encompassing more than the words of the Honor Code depends on their total experience, much of it well outside the ken of USMA. Within its proper limits, however, West Point asks cadets to participate fully in its special moral climate. The Academy encourages the development of mature moral beliefs by offering to cadets both required and elective courses investigating moral issues, by bringing other training and [illegible] together so that all elements are mutually supportive, and by providing a staff and faculty [illegible] to the need for an Army led by officers with well-reasoned moral views. To the extent that cadet and institution succeed, the graduated cadet should [illegible] an ethic [illegible]

informed understanding of the moral implications of being a particular kind of human being--a professional officer of the U.S. Army.

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Anyone desiring a copy of the last edition of *Ethics and the Military Profession*, dedicated to the topic of "A Professional Ethic," may obtain one by contacting the Editor, CPT Bill Jeffries (4337). A limited number of copies of edition I, "War and Morality" are also still available. This announcement, however, marks the last time we can make it available. Beginning January, 1979, inquiries concerning *Ethics and the Military Profession* should be addressed to either CPT Ted Higgs or CPT Jim Narel, in the Department of English (4337).

The following bibliographic information is provided for those of you desiring to maintain up-to-date bibliographies on the subjects discussed in previous editions. The entries provided are for works published since the corresponding edition of *Ethics and the Military Profession* or are suggested improvements or translations listed previously. We encourage you to contact the editor for similar suggestions you may have; bibliographic annotations are always appreciated.

I. *War and Morality.*

A potentially important work in the area of aggression theory and human nature has recently been written by prominent anthropologist Marvin Harris: *Cannibals and Kings: The Origin of Culture* (New York: Random House, 1977). Harris argues the inverse of the Ardreyan thesis. Man's aggressiveness does not spawn war; war causes man's aggressive spirit. He sees war as the result of population regulation and, along with female infanticide, the price to be paid for preventing a lowering of standards to bare subsistence levels. Two other works concerned with Christian conscience and war have also recently come to my attention. Arthur F. Holmes has edited *War and Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975). This work brings together brief excerpts from both Christian and non-Christian thinkers from Plato to Reinhold Niebuhr. Commentary is held to a minimum, and the primary documents are allowed to speak for themselves. Selections offered treat the problem from the perspective of political and ethical theory. Another work in a less secular vein is Jean Laserre's *War and the Gospel*. The history of pacifism has also been updated by Michael Howard's *War and the Liberal Conscience*. This significant contribution to scholarship surveys attitudes toward war from Erasmus to objectors to the Vietnam war. One should read Howard's work before another previously unlisted work on the same subject, *Christian Pacifism in History* by O. F. Nuttal (1958). The 1977 Protocols to the Geneva Convention of 1949 codify some of the evolutionary changes which have been prompted by the experiences of the last three decades. A recent article by Hays W. Parks--"The 1977 Protocols to the Geneva Convention of 1949," *Naval War College Review*, 31, 2, 269 (Fall 1978), 14-1--reviews the importance of these Protocols as they affect "means and methods of warfare, legality of weapons, protection of medical transportation, and

internal warfare." A final addition to "War and Morality" is a more reputable translation of Clausewitz's *On War*, by Michael Howard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

II. *The Professional Ethic.*

Since the publication of this pamphlet, a new book, *Crisis in Command* by Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), has appeared. It is a provocative and timely study of American military ethical dilemmas. The authors argue that much of the disaster of Vietnam can be explained not by political ideology but by a collapse in morale and performance of the Officer Corps of the United States Army. This collapse, according to the authors, was prompted by an emphasis on "management" in lieu of "leadership." A not unrelated book is a widely selling work entitled *On The Psychology of Military Incompetence* by Norman F. Dixon (New York: Basic Books, 1976). Dixon offers a psychological and historical survey of examples of military incompetence. If you grant him his presuppositions, Dixon's reductivistic approach follows. To this reader, however, his study is flawed and unremarkable.

FUTURE EVENTS

The Department of English will continue its visiting lecturer program this spring. Prominent philosophers and moral philosophers have been invited to address philosophical and axiological issues. All sessions are open to USMA Staff and Faculty and will be advertised in the Daily Bulletin. The next scheduled lecture will address "War and Morality." The speaker will be Professor Thomas Nagel, Princeton University. The lecture will be presented on 21 December at a time and place to be announced. Other lectures currently scheduled by the Department of History and Behavioral Science and Leadership include:

Dr. Harmon Smith, Philosopher and Professor of Applied Medical Ethics, Duke University Medical Center, will speak on "Medical Ethics," 12 December 1978, in Room 102, Thayer Hall. The time will be announced in the Daily Bulletin.

Professor Morton Deutsch, prominent psychologist and educator, will speak on "Equity Theory," 1915 hours, 5 December 1978, in Room 228, Bartlett Hall.

Professor Norman Gibbs, Visiting Professor of History, will speak on "War and Morality," 1915 hours, 10 January 1979, in Room 102, Thayer Hall.

Please bring information concerning events in the areas of philosophy and ethics to the Editor (4377) for dissemination to the West Point community. If you have suggestions for possible areas of research or issues for in future editions of *Ethics and the Military Profession*, please forward them to the Editor, *Ethics and the Military Profession*, Department of English, or to a member of the Ethics and Professionalism Committee.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. *Should* ethics be taught?

2. *Can* ethics be taught?

3. What should be the proper goals of ethical inquiry?

4. Who should teach ethics?

5. Can you test moral behavior?

6. Can you measure the competence of ethics instructors?

7. Is moral knowledge a cognitive skill?

These questions and others are the subject of a fledgling but growing literature on the teaching of ethics. A large percentage of this literature shows the influence of Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget. The selected bibliography that follows attempts to give a balanced look at the more important writings. Not included is the extensive treatment of the development of cognitive skills and moral knowledge in children and literature pertaining to the teaching of ethics in specific pre-professional programs, e.g. law, medicine, politics.

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Archambault, R.D. "Criteria for Success in Moral Instruction." *Harvard Educational Review*, 33 (Fall 1963), 472-483. By applying the language and methodology of Israel Scheffler's *The Language of Education* to moral education, Archambault explores "the school's role and responsibility with regard to moral instruction, and, more basically, an adequate definition of 'moral instruction' and a description of what this involves."

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Blatt, M. and L. Kohlberg. "Effects of Classroom Discussion Upon Children's Level of Moral Judgement." In *Recent Research in Moral Development*. Ed. L. Kohlberg and E. Turiel. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1973.

Bok, Derek C. "Can Ethics Be Taught?" *Change* (October 1976), 26-30. Derek Bok, President of Harvard University, addresses the role universities and colleges can play in overcoming the apparent decline in adherence to ethical standards. Arguing an interdisciplinary approach to teaching ethics, Bok focuses on the essential dilemma: Who should teach ethics? "Poor instruction can harm any class. But it is devastating to a course on ethics, for it confirms the prejudices of those students and faculty who suspect that moral reasoning is inherently inconclusive and that courses on moral issues will soon become vehicles for transmitting the private prejudices of the instructor."

Callahan, Daniel. "Ethics and Value Education." *Liberal Education*, 64, . (May 1978), 134-143. Callahan confronts the question: "to what extent it is possible to solidly, acceptably, and legitimately attempt to introduce students in a serious way to ethical and value questions." Essentially the same paper found in *National Forum* under the title, "The Rebirth of Ethics."

Callahan, Daniel. "The Rebirth of Ethics." *National Forum* (Spring 1978), 9-12. Callahan, Director of the Hastings Center, Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences, assesses the rapidly growing interest in values and ethics throughout the country. He reviews several questions remaining to be answered as the teaching of ethics burgeons in America's higher education: (1) What are the possible goals of the teaching of ethics? (2) How can or should ethics be taught? (3) Who is to teach ethics?

Charzan, Barry, and Jonas Soltis, eds. *Moral Education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1975.

Clark, Tom C. "Teaching Professional Ethics." *San Diego Law Review*, 1. (1975), 249-260.

Dearden, R.F., P.H. Hirst, and R.S. Peters. *Education and the Development of Reason*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.

Frankena, William. "Toward a Philosophy of Moral Education." *Harvard Educational Review*, 28 (fall 1958), 300-313. Frankena deals with the way in which society must fulfill a twofold task in regard to moral education: (1) hand on a "knowledge of good and evil" or "knowing how" to act, and (2) insuring children's conduct conforms to this "knowledge."

Goosens, William K. "What Philosophy Tries to Teach." *Teaching Philosophy*, 1 (Summer 1975), 1-11. A sound look at the proper goals for a philosophy/ethics course. Distinguishing between what philosophy is and what philosophy tries to teach, Goosens proposes a teaching theory indicating that what philosophy tries to teach is not simply method or a way of life but a form of creativity. He discusses both cognitive and non-cognitive conceptions of what it is to philosophize. His thesis is that philosophy/ethics does have "cognitive content and that fundamentally, what it is to philosophize is to contribute to that cognitive content."

Gordon, David. "Free-Will and the Indoctrinability of Moral Education." *Educational Theory*, 25 (1975), 407-416.

Green, Thomas F. "Problems of Moral Education." Unpublished paper presented at the Hastings Center Conference on the Teaching of Ethics, October 14-, 1978 (available in the Department of English library). In discussing problems inherent in the teaching of ethics, the author centers on the "problem" of indoctrination in moral knowledge. His provocative thesis is: "Indoctrination will be the result of any successful moral education, but indoctrination cannot be the method."

Greene, Maxine. "Moral Development and the Teaching of Ethics." Unpublished paper presented at the Hastings Center Conference on the Teaching of Ethics, October 19-20, 1978 (available in the Department of English library). After reviewing several prominent positions on the teaching of ethics, Greene suggests her own technique: "Opening . . . the classroom to the impure world outside." What she means is slighting formal reasoning skills in favor of fostering analysis of moral situations. The advantage of the approach is that contemporary public issues--health care, abortion, euthanasia, bussing, integration, pollution, admissions procedures--can provide the basis for interesting as well as timely discussion. The end of such discussions should be to hold students responsible for the decisions they make.

Hill, B.V. "Education for Rational Morality or Moral Rationality." *Educational Theory*, 27, 3 (1977), 286-293.

Hodges, Louis W. "Applied Ethics and Pre-Professionals." Unpublished paper presented at the Hastings Center Conference on the Teaching of Ethics, October 19-20, 1978 (available in the Department of English library). Although Hodges' paper is concerned primarily with teaching ethics to medical students, his general comments on the teaching of applied ethics are apt for any professional school. After reviewing possible goals for ethics instruction, Hodges addresses most of the other central questions normally raised when ethics courses are introduced: Who will teach? What is the subject matter? Will the course amount to indoctrination? What are the intellectual, bibliographic resources? How do we resolve faculty tensions and presuppositions?

Institute of Society, Ethics and The Life Sciences. *Project on the Teaching of Ethics: Progress Report*. Hastings-on-Hudson, 1978. Arthur Caplan, Associate for the Humanities at The Hastings Center, summarizes the Institute's progress toward achieving five goals: (1) development of a coherent analysis of the teaching of ethics, (2) survey of "efforts to give ethics a more central role in the curriculum," (3) collection of course syllabi, (4) establishment of active communication among those involved in ethics instruction, and (5) offer of assistance to those involved in ethics instruction.

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Kohlberg, Lawrence and E. Turiel. *Recent Research in Moral Development*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1971. A thorough study of the philosophical contentions in relation to moral education.

Lazarus, Francis. "Leadership and the Liberal Arts." Unpublished study, USMA, 1978. The author explores the extent to which the liberal arts can be effective in building leadership skills. According to Lazarus the study of philosophic dialectic fosters "discipline over one's mind." Such study of philosophy/ethics contributes to "self-discipline and self-control which constitute the essential strength of character necessary for developing moral integrity."

Middleberg, M.I. "Moral Education and the Liberal Arts." *Educational Record*, 57, 4 (1976), 236-240. Middleberg argues that most "colleges and universities have adopted a policy of 'value neutrality' in order to protect academic freedom and to survive." The general indifference on the part of educators to axiological considerations--which Middleberg argues lies at the heart of educational processes--stems from their assuming that "value judgments are too limited, ambiguous, and complex to be taught."

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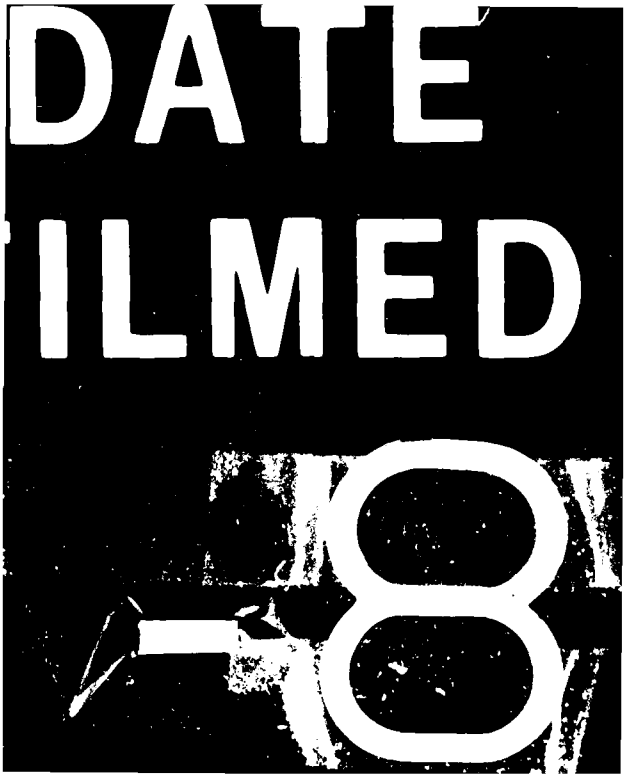
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